

*“Seeing Is Believing?”*

It is said that “Years ago when Johnny Carson was the host of The Tonight Show he interviewed an eight year old boy. The young man was asked to appear because he had rescued two friends in a coalmine outside his hometown in West Virginia. As Johnny questioned the boy, it became apparent to him and the audience that the young man was a Christian. So Johnny asked him if he attended Sunday school. When the boy said he did Johnny inquired, ‘What are you learning in Sunday school?’ ‘Last week,’ came his reply, ‘our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine.’ The audience roared, but Johnny tried to keep a straight face. Then he said, ‘And what did you learn from that story?’ The boy squirmed in his chair. It was apparent he hadn’t thought about this. But then he lifted up his face and said, ‘If you’re going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!’” “The little boy was on to something. Weddings are times of Joy.” (Sermons.com)

Previously, I usually focused on the tense interaction between Mary and her son, Jesus, during the Wedding Feast reported in the Reading – the Wedding the boy spoke of to Johnny. In the past, we have looked at the dynamics of their relationship. We have also considered the importance of Jesus’ first miracle with reference to how the author of the Gospel of John utilized it to document his historical account about the nature of Jesus’ Life and Public Ministry.

Today, we are going to examine what the author of the Gospel of John meant in verse 11 and that verse’s implication about the disciples, the Christian community – the Church, and ourselves. **Verse 11 states, “Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.”** Today’s Sermon Title – “Seeing Is Believing?” is intended to aid our coming to a better understanding of the meaning of verse 11. The title is a question. The reason I chose to make it a question is because today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading is often interpreted to be a public miracle through which Jesus proved he was the Messiah to his disciples. However, it seems to me, this Scripture disproves the saying “Seeing is believing” and reveals, instead, a very important and different understanding of how one comes to receive the Gift of Faith.

Did the disciples really believe in Jesus because of the miracle of changing the water into wine for the Wedding Feast? There is plenty of evidence in the Gospel of John and in the other Synoptic Gospels, which demonstrate the disciples did not truly comprehend Jesus’ identity and purpose until after his Death and Resurrection! So, what did they believe about Jesus after his First Miracle? **They may have told each other God was with Jesus, however, they certainly did not conclude at that moment that he was the Messiah.** Remember, the first time one of them was reported to have declared Jesus to be the Messiah was much later – when the eldest disciple, Peter, answered the question from Jesus about who the populace said he was. **Peter’s testimony about Jesus being the Messiah was included in Matthew 16:16, Mark 8:29b, and Luke 9:20b.**

The Gospel of John did not report that same situation but did reveal Peter gave something of a testimony about Jesus’ identity in **John 6:69, “And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God.”** That declaration came following the crowd abandoning Jesus because in his confrontation with them – those who followed him because he feed more than 5,000 people, Jesus demanded his followers eat his flesh and drink his blood! I note, Peter’s testimony in the Gospel of John did not come as a result of a miracle but because following the crowd’s rejection of Jesus, he challenged his original disciples to leave like the crowd! Instead of believing because of the miracle, Peter’s witness came as a result of the twelve’s relationship with Jesus.

Patrick Cooney wrote an article in the Reader’s Digest which was titled, “Why I Wear Two Wedding Bands.” “Cooney says that he has worn two wedding bands for more than a dozen years. When he’s asked about them, he responds, ‘I have two wives.’ He’s kidding, of course.

One day a stranger would not let him off with this glib answer about why he wears two bands. So Cooney spilled the whole story. He explained his father died in 1999. As they were saying their final farewells at his funeral, his mother, who had been married to his father for 50-plus years, removed his father’s wedding band

and handed it to Patrick. Surprised, he placed the gold band on his left middle finger, next to his wedding band. There it has remained. He told the stranger that he wears his father's wedding band to honor his father and his parents' marriage. He also wears it to remind himself to be the son, brother, husband, and dad that his father wanted him to be. He is now 60 years old and has been married for 30 years. The stranger walked away, then turned back and said, 'Sir, you know, I have my father's wedding band in my sock drawer at home, and beginning today, I am going to start wearing it.'"

After describing that incident, King Duncan continued, "Powerful story. But isn't it true of all our relationships? It's important not only to be faithful and attentive to our spouse, but to our children or our parents and our friends." Duncan concluded, "I can tell you right now, without any hesitation at all that it is God's will for us to take care of our relationships." (Adapted by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com)

As I mentioned earlier, in the Gospel of John, Peter made his declaration about Jesus' identity because of the disciples' relationship with their Teacher and not because of Jesus' miracles. **Indeed, in the verse prior to Peter's statement – verse 68, he first answered Jesus, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life."** It was not merely the miracles, which the disciples had seen Jesus do, that led them to have enough faith in him to stay with him after the crowd abandoned him. They had formed a significant relationship with him – they had lived with him – heard his teachings and conversations, eaten with him, and assisted him in loving others. Yet, they were still not able to fully comprehend his true nature and identity until following his death and resurrection!

**You and I have also come to have an important relationship of living with Jesus – as the living testimony of the Good News and those, who have helped us to experience it and him, take root in us as facilitated through the Holy Spirit.** That is why we are able to believe without seeing the Crucified and Risen Son of God, Jesus Christ! Indeed, it is through our relationships – our loving and supporting one another that others come to experience the Gospel as being authentic in their own lives and relationships.

**Remember, in verse 11 of our Scripture, we were told, "Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him."** I underlined that portion of verse 11 to remind us it was Jesus' glory, which transformed his relationship with the original twelve disciples. Jesus' glory is manifesting God's Self-Giving Agape Love. You and I show Jesus' glory when we follow his pattern of graciously loving and caring for one another. Let's remember, he played down his part – sought to hide his making the Wedding Feast a success, while he lived agape love – was merciful toward the bride and groom!

Discussing today's Scripture, Phillip Yancey challenged us when he wrote, "Tellingly, John notes that the wine came from huge thirty-gallon jugs that stood full of water at the front of the house, vessels that were used by observant Jews to fulfill the rules on ceremonial washing. Even a wedding feast had to honor the burdensome rituals of cleansing. Jesus, perhaps with a twinkle in his eye, transformed those jugs, ponderous symbols of the old way, into wineskins, harbingers of the new. From purified water of the Pharisees came the choice new wine of a whole new era. The time for ritual cleansing had passed; the time for celebration had begun."

Yancey concluded, "Prophets like John the Baptist preached judgment. Jesus' first miracle, though, was one of tender mercy. The lesson was not lost on the disciples who joined him at the wedding that night in Cana." Yancey challenged, "Don't let it be lost on you!" (Adapted from Phillip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995, p. 168.)

Instead of depending on the false assumption that we can prove Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God – make people believe merely by seeing our dramatic retelling of the Scriptures, let's show Jesus' "tender mercy" – his embodiment of God's Self-Giving Agape Love – his Radical Hospitality and Welcome to all – to all who are seeking or in need of a relationship with the Divine's Son and God's Agape Love! Amen.